

VARICELLA (CHICKEN POX)

Vaccine Fact Sheet

(VARIVAX[®] III or VARILRIX[®] Vaccine)

WHAT IS VARICELLA DISEASE AND HOW IS IT SPREAD?

Commonly known as chicken pox, varicella is a highly contagious disease common in children but can also infect teens and adults. It begins with fever, followed by an itchy red rash that progresses to fluid-filled blisters. As the disease progresses, blisters break open, scab over and heal. It can cause birth defects if a pregnant woman is infected. It spreads from person to person through the air by coughing and sneezing, or through direct contact with fluid from a blister from one to two days before the rash appears until after all the blisters have scabbed over. It is caused by the varicella-zoster virus, which can reactivate later in life as shingles.

HOW CAN VARICELLA BE PREVENTED?

- **Vaccination is the best protection against varicella.** Varicella vaccines are safe and effective
- Two doses are recommended for optimal protection, given at 15 months and between four and six years of age. The four- to six-year-old dose is usually given as MMRV (measles, mumps, rubella, and varicella) vaccine
- The province of Ontario covers the cost of this vaccine for people born on or after January 1, 2000, who are at least one year of age

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS OF THE VACCINE?

- Redness, swelling or discomfort at the injection site
- A varicella like rash at the injection site
- Low grade fever
- Very mild symptoms of the disease, but this is rare. These mild symptoms are not dangerous and can demonstrate that the vaccine is working effectively to build immunity
- Severe side effects are rare

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WHO SHOULD AVOID THIS VACCINE?

Anyone who:

- Had a severe allergic (anaphylactic) reaction to a previous dose of this vaccine in the past
- Has an allergy to any component of the vaccine including neomycin, neomycin sulphate or porcine gelatin*
- Is pregnant or think they may be pregnant
- Is immunocompromised due to illness or medication
- Received a live vaccine in the past six weeks or a blood product in the past three months

WHO SHOULD CONSULT THEIR HEALTH CARE PROVIDER BEFORE VACCINATION?

Anyone with complicated medical issues or previous severe reactions to vaccines should consult their health care provider before receiving the varicella vaccine.

* This vaccine is approved for use in members of religious groups who oppose the ingestion of pig products.
Reference: www.vaccinesafety.edu/religion-and-vaccines